



THE MEDALS OF ADMIRAL EDWARD VERNON

(commemorating a victory that never happened)
Central Ohio Numismatic Association
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Bruce Smith

12 November 1684 – 30 October
1757



“Old Grog” (as
painted by
Gainsborough)

Admiral Vernon:

- joined the Navy in 1700.
- had a successful service record in the Mediterranean and the West Indies. Promoted to Captain in 1706.
- became a member of Parliament.
- in 1739 took up the cause of one Robert Jenkins and declared that he could take Porto Bello “with six ships only.” Prime Minister Robert Walpole opposed the action, stating, “They may ring their bells now; they will be wringing their hands before long.”
- Was made Vice-Admiral in 1739. and on Nov. 22, 1739 captured Porto Bello.
- In April 1741, Vernon’s vast armada was defeated by a much smaller force in the Battle of Cartagena des Indias.
- His naval career ended 1746.

The War of Jenkins' Ear

End of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1713/1714 leaves Spain and England in conflict over smuggling and piracy.

Spain protects itself in the New World with privateer coast guard vessels authorized to stop ships and rewarded by discovering contraband.

In 1731 Robert Jenkins, master of the *Rebecca*, has his ear cut off by a Spanish officer.

Tensions mount between Spain and England. In 1739, Jenkins presents his preserved ear to parliament; The War of Jenkins' Ear results.

The War of Jenkins' Ear



Porto Bello

- 1. Porto Bello is an important Spanish port. Treasure fleets leave from its fortified harbor.
- 2. Vernon attacked with just six ships. He felt that a smaller, powerful, fast moving force was superior. The battle began
November 21, 1739.
- 3. The following day the Spanish commander surrendered, but he that his troops keep their arms, ammunition, and clothing as well as two cannons. He also wanted four days to deliver up the fortress. Vernon agreed to most of the terms but said that the castle must be turned over by 3:00 that afternoon and the Spanish gone by the next morning.
- 4. Vernon's loss was three dead and seven injured. He captured the town. The English stayed for three weeks destroying the three forts and other important buildings, effectively knocking out the port as an important Spanish base..
- 5. In March 1740, Vernon's ships bombarded Fort Chagre, also in Panama.
- struck in commemoration of this victory.



Jingoism at Its Best!



The British Glory Revived!

The Spanish Pride Pulled Down by Admiral Vernon!

Brave Vernon Made Us Free/No Search Upon the Seas
Shall be!

Don Blas de Lezo 1688- 1741 (minus one eye, one hand, and one leg)

"Because of him, we don't speak English."

- Colombian Saying



Battle of Cartagena des Indias



1. Vernon commanded 286 ships and over 20,000 men.
2. Vernon is so sure of himself that he sends a message of victory to George II.

This is greeted with even more enthusiasm than his victory at Porto Bello.

3. Vernon and General Wentworth, commander of the army, disagreed on tactics. When the invading forces were finally landed they were repulsed by the defenders (less than 2,000). Disease played a significant role in weakening the British Forces.

4. An attack on Havana was considered but the idea was abandoned.

Regardless, medals were struck to commemorate this non-event

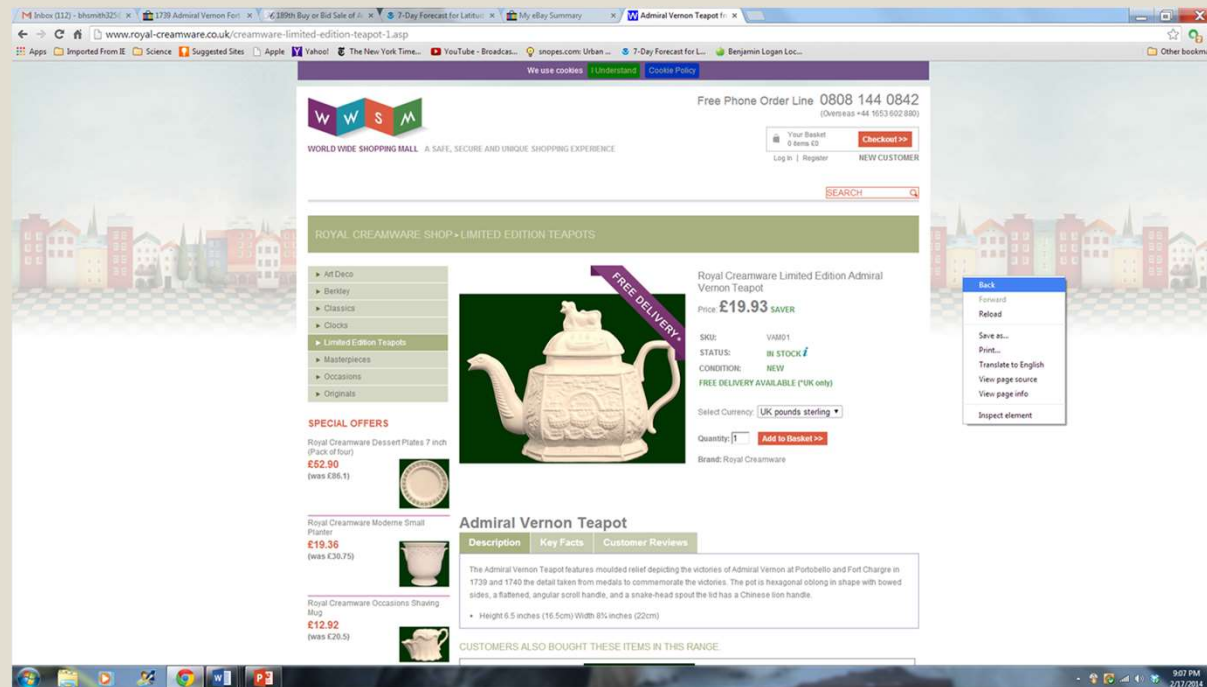
Some interesting asides:

- Areas of London, Dublin, and Edinburgh are named for the victory (ex. Portobello Road in London)
- Vernon was granted Freedom of the City of London (kind of like having a key to the city)
- Rule Britannia was composed during the celebration.
- Vernon wore grogham coat : a coarse loosely woven fabric of silk, silk and mohair, or silk and wool Hence, “Old Grog”
- Vernon ordered his sailor’s daily ration of rum to be cut with citrus juice. The resulting drink became known as grog. Vernon’s sailors were known to be healthier, but this was before James Lind’s scientific demonstration that citrus juice prevented scurvy.
- 3,600 American colonial troops served in the Battle of Cartagena des Indias, the first time American troops would serve outside the borders of the colonies (only 300 survived).
- One of those who served as a Marine Captain on Vernon’s flagship would later name his plantation after his commander. It was...?

The Medals

- The medals are generally not the work of especially accomplished medalists, but there is a great range of skill evident.
- Most are made of copper alloy (bronze, brass)
- Pinchbeck is a specific brass alloy that was used in some medals.
- Silver medals (and one gold) exist.
- Other Vernon related objects were produced (snuff box, corkscrew, ladle) with the same images.

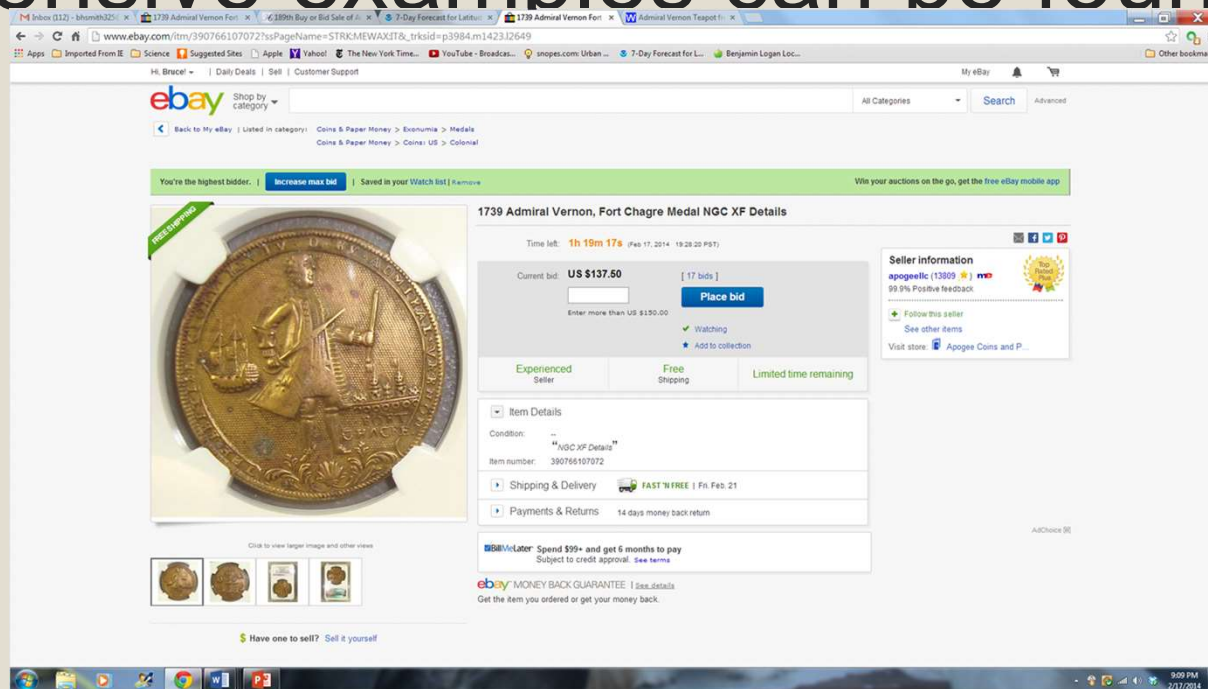
Tea, anyone? Pour from your very own Admiral Vernon teapot!



Collecting Admiral Vernon Medals

- As always, buy the book before the coin.
- 24 works on Admiral Vernon medals (167 varieties listed in Betts); the newest, *Medallic Portraits of Admiral Vernon* by John Adams and Fernando Chao, is the Bible (published by Kolbe and Fanning of Gahanna)
- In *Medallic Portraits of Admiral Vernon* collecting suggestions include:
 - 1. by variety (madness, but why not?)
 - 2. nine piece type set
 - 3. signed medals
 - 4. errors (grammatical and historical)
- As The War of Jenkins' Ear is a part of European conflicts that would lead to The French and Indian War and the American Revolution, any collection of United States coinage could benefit from the inclusion of just a single example

Admiral Vernon medals are R-4 (76 – 200 on the Sheldon scale) or rarer, yet inexpensive examples can be found.



Adam's and Chao's Classification System

- NL: Portrait of Vernon but no location cited
- PB: No portrait, but Porto bello cited
- PBv: Porto Bello cited, with portrait of Vernon alone
- Pbvi: Porto Bello cited, Vernon accompanied by icons (cannons etc.)
- PBvb, PBvl, etc.: Porto Bello cited, multiple portraits
- FC: Fort Chagre named on the obverse
- CA: Cartegena named on the obverse
- HA: Havana named on the obverse
- UNI: Uniface Pieces and other Vernoniana
- Each of these designations is followed by a number for the obverse die and a letter for the reverse die.



PBvi



6-G (R5)



CAv



2-B (R5)

Grading?

- These pieces circulated, although not as money.
- They were holed for suspension.
- They are found corroded, bent, and otherwise abused.
- Some grading services